

Observations of a Dibbler (*Parantechinus apicalis*) feeding on *Banksia media* - The Fitzgerald River National Park, on the south coast of Western Australia, is home to the only known natural population of the Dibbler (*Parantechinus apicalis*) on the mainland (Start, T., 1998, *Dibblers. Landscape* 14 (2): 28-34). Commencing in 2001, as part of the Dibbler Recovery Program, another population was established at Peniup proposed nature reserve, approximately 25 kilometres west of the Fitzgerald River NP (Friend, J.A., 2004, *Dibbler (Parantechinus apicalis) Recovery Plan, July 2003 - June 2012.* CALM, Perth).

While trapping to monitor the reintroduced Dibbler population at Peniup, we observed a *P. apicalis* eating from the flower of a *Banksia media*. On the morning of 18 March 2004, we were checking a grid of Elliott traps. It was quite a pleasant morning with sunshine, clear skies and a slight breeze.

At approximately 8:05 am we found a male *P. apicalis*, ninety grams in weight, in one of our traps. We had caught this individual two days earlier. He had patches of lost fur and had lost the tip of his tail prior to the first capture. Upon release, the Dibbler moved quickly into the shelter of nearby bushes. Soon afterwards, a Dibbler (presumably the same individual) returned from the direction in which it had left. The animal moved to the bottom of the

nearest *Banksia media* bush, roughly four metres from us, and began to climb up onto the lower branches. We watched as the *P. apicalis* moved across to a large flower about 400mm off the ground, 110mm in height and 75mm in diameter.

The *P. apicalis* climbed completely onto the flower so that its body no longer touched the branches. It circled around the flower before pushing its nose into the centre for two or three seconds. The *P. apicalis* moved around the flower quite rapidly, lingering at one spot for a few seconds before moving to a different part of the flower. This continued for around 2 to 3 minutes before the *P. apicalis* had either finished or was disturbed. It then climbed back on to the banksia branches and started heading towards us, staying on the banksia. When it got to within 3 metres of us, it looked in our direction and turned around. It jumped onto the ground and ran across a clearing towards another banksia, with the tip of his tail raised to approximately 40° to the horizontal. By this time it was about 8.25 am. The whole observation had been in broad daylight.

Once the *P. apicalis* was out of sight, we examined the banksia flower that it had eaten from. We found no insects present and nectar could not be felt on the fingers. However, upon inspection of a different flower of the same species, both small insects and nectar were present.

Dibblers were thought to be extinct until they were rediscovered in January 1967 by wildlife photographer Michael Morcombe. He placed flywire traps over the flowers of *Banksia attenuata* at Cheyne Beach, to catch Honey Possums (*Tarsipes rostratus*) as they fed on the flowers. By the second morning, he had rediscovered the Dibbler (Morcombe, M., 1967, The

rediscovery after 83 years of the Dibbler *Antechinus apicalis* (Marsupialia, Dasyuridae), *The Western Australian Naturalist*, 10: 108-109).

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